

'Medea dances, Medea cries'

United Solo Festival, started in 2010 in New York, is the biggest solo performance festival in the world. Every year, for over two months, in Theatre Row in Manhattan, the stage is ruled by solo form of the theatre, performed by artists from countries of all continents, including Poland. We can admire performances of experienced and awarded artists as well as rising, yet to be discovered talents. The aim of the festival is to show the diversity of theatrical forms like narration, puppet theatre, dance, multimedia, documentary, musical, improvisation, pantomime and poetry. There are also illusionists' shows and all shades of drama. This is a perfect opportunity for mutual inspirations by many conceptions and visions of the theatre, for intercultural integration, but also for showing your own national identity.

The artistic director of the Festival is Omar Sangare, actor, director, producer, teatrologist, educator and writer. He was born in Poland, in Stalowa Wola, and currently works and lives in the USA. Asked about the festival, he says: 'The idea of the festival was born from the inner need of emotional exhibitionism. In present days, utterly ruled by the cult of body, and the spirit merely hiding in its shadow, monodrama is an exclusive form of negligee, which only few can afford.' In 2013 selected one-actor performances travelled to Poland, to Teatr Syrena for the first time. On its stage, they gave possibilities for intimate meetings and reflections on human thrives and fears, often on loneliness of a person living in contemporary world.

During this year's edition of United Solo Europe Festival, which allows meeting the culture and unique stage aesthetics of different nations, we can see many prominent artists. They are not only perform in the theatre but also conduct workshops, share their knowledge and experience in the art of monodrama. On the second day of the festival, an artist nicknamed Yokko, who presented her own adaptation of a Greek myth about Medea, occupied the stage. Yokko is a Japanese artist from Nagoa, Butoh dancer, choreographer and certified yoga instructor. She is a prize-winner of many prestigious awards as well as the founder and artistic director of Ren Guo Soh Theatre. The myth she chose tells the story of infanticide – it's know all over the world but many playwrights, directors and artist come back to it eagerly and continuously look for new meanings.

Monodrama is a perfect means of reaching the hearts even more deeply. The audience is intrigued by the way the artist combines the Greek myth coming from Mediterranean culture and Japanese theatre of Butoh, 'a dance of darkness'. It's worth mentioning that Butoh dance was born in Japan at the turn of 1950s and 1960s. It expressed the rebellion against unnatural, trained perfection of body movements. It calls back to old Japanese rituals, believes, folk aesthetics and ugliness, but also derives from modern dance and other forms.

Telling about the feeling of autonomy and individuality, the artist starts the richness of imagination, associations that are both hers and the audience's; she fills her solo performance with an amazing dance and poetry. Her unique monodrama, very shocking at some points, 'blures' the cultural borders. Not only with word, but also in the space behind it, Yokko can express the essence of the story and fullness of the character's emotions. It doesn't matter that we hear a foreign language. Most of the audience is also unfamiliar with the character of presented dance. But a woman who in her rejection and condemnation fights for her dignity can be understood everywhere. Stranger! This name accompanies Medea since forever, since she left home shore. A witch, an evil. But she loved Jason so much that she sacrificed everything for him, she broke family ties, she committed many crimes. Isn't that love? Yokko-Medea asks this question many times. No one feels sorry neither for her nor her children, who are also exiled. Is it because she is a foreigner, a stranger? And a woman? She won't find an ally among the inhabitants; her husband's betrayal doesn't cause their aversion. 'Butoh Medea' is a deeply touching performance basing on emotions. There is so much pain and sadness. Medea is in frenzy caused by love and desire of revenge, the theatre is filled with music

which gets louder and louder. The artist – agitated by shivers – tears her clothes apart. There is nothing kitch about it, only suffering saturated with blood -imitated by lights- and an amazing, fascinating movement of her body. This is an attempt to find her own, unique, artistic expression and getting to the limits of sensitivity. Yokko isn't afraid of nudity and ugliness. She doesn't want to be beautiful, she wants to be understood and the uniqueness of Butoh makes it possible for her.

The audience awards her performance with standing ovation, and the moved artist who doesn't try to hide her tears. I hope that one day we will have another opportunity to meet Butoh dance, the dance of life, and its extraordinary performer.

United Solo Europe : Yokko - Butoh Medea